

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Peck & Hills Furniture Company Warehouse

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing:

)

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 909 West Bliss Street

City or town: Chicago State: IL County: Cook

Not For Publication: N/A Vicinity: N/A

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___national ___statewide ___local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

 A B C D

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government

Peck & Hills Furniture Company

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

☐ entered in the National Register

☐ determined eligible for the National Register

☐ determined not eligible for the National Register

☐ removed from the National Register

☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

☒

Public – Local

☐

Public – State

☐

Public – Federal

☐

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s)

☒

District

☐

Site

☐

Structure

☐

Object

☐

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing

Noncontributing

1

buildings

sites

structures

objects

1

Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE/Warehouse

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19th AND EARLY 20th CENTURY AMERICAN
MOVEMENT/Commercial Style

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

CONCRETE

BRICK

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Peck & Hills Furniture Company Warehouse, located near the center of Goose Island on the north side of Chicago, is a roughly U-shaped three- and six-story brick warehouse oriented around a rail spur that extends south to north through the center of the lot. The building was constructed in three phases between 1905 and 1927. The first section of the building, completed in 1905, is timber frame with load-bearing masonry exterior walls. The second and third sections, completed in 1910-1911, are early examples of flat slab concrete construction designed by noted industrial architect W. E. Walker. Although constructed separately, Sections A, B, and C have consistent fenestration and exterior detailing to form a continuous three-story rectangular block along Hickory Street. The fourth and largest section (Section D), a triangular six-story structure designed by N. Max Dunning and built on the west side of the lot in 1926-1927, is flat slab concrete structure

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and exterior elevations with masonry piers and spandrels framing large expanses of steel sash windows. The building retains good integrity and conveys its significance as an early twentieth century furniture warehouse.

Narrative Description

Note: This building is not aligned on cardinal points. To simplify the following description, the elevation fronting onto Bliss Street will be referred to as the north elevation. The remaining elevations will follow this orientation.

Site and Setting

The Peck & Hills Furniture Company Warehouse is located at the intersection of North Hickory Avenue and West Bliss Street on a trapezoidal lot near the south end of Goose Island, a small island located between the North Branch of the Chicago River and the North Branch Canal. Goose Island developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as an industrial and manufacturing district, but the vast majority of these early industrial structures on the island are no longer extant. The building is surrounded primarily by modern low-rise office buildings and parking lots.

Exterior

The Peck & Hills Furniture Company Warehouse is a roughly U-shaped three- and six-story brick warehouse oriented around a rail spur that extends south to north through the center of the lot. The building was constructed in three phases between 1905 and 1927, and together these sections illustrate the evolution of industrial fire-proof construction during the first decades of the twentieth century. The first section of the building (labeled Section B in the attached Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps), completed in 1905, is timber frame with load-bearing masonry exterior walls. The second and third sections, completed in 1910-1911 (Sections A and C), are early examples of flat slab concrete construction designed by noted industrial architect W. E. Walker. Although constructed separately, Sections A, B, and C have consistent fenestration and exterior detailing to form a continuous three-story rectangular block along Hickory Street. The fourth and largest section (Section D), a triangular six-story structure designed by N. Max Dunning and built on the west side of the lot in 1926-1927, exemplifies the industrial construction methods of the 1920s, with flat slab concrete structure and exterior elevations with masonry piers and spandrels framing large expanses of steel sash windows.

Section B (1905)

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The oldest section of the Peck & Hills Furniture Company Warehouse is roughly 100 feet by 70 feet, and is abutted on the south by Section A and on the north by Section B. The exposed east elevation fronts onto Hickory Avenue and features common brick walls regularly fenestrated with pairs of segmental-arched window openings on the third story and smaller arched openings on the second story. All of these window openings were infilled with brick in the early 1930s when the Ogden Avenue viaduct was constructed with a feeder ramp on Hickory Street that ran directly adjacent to the building. However, the window openings are still evident because of the arched rowlock brick headers. The first story holds pairs of loading entrances, which are intact. The exposed west elevation overlooks the rail spur, which forms a narrow courtyard between the Sections A, B, and C and Section D across the track. The west elevation is similarly fenestrated, but the windows—12-over-12 double-hung wood sash—are extant in the original openings behind corrugated metal panels.

The roof of Section B is flat, with terra cotta tiles capping the parapet.

Section A (1911-1930s)

Section A is the southernmost section of the east wing of the building and the smallest of the building sections. When it was completed in 1911, the structure extended approximately 75 feet along Hickory Avenue. This section was partially demolished in the 1930s when the Ogden Avenue viaduct was constructed and is angled to follow the course of the viaduct. The south elevation was rebuilt at that time. The southeast and southwest corners project slightly from the south wall, forming distinct end bays. These bays house a single large window opening at each story and feature rows of simple brick corbeling at the parapets, which extend slightly above the primary roofline. The center bays of the south elevation feature irregular window openings on the first story, all of which have been infilled with brick. The second story holds large banks of historic multi-light steel sash windows in all but the easternmost bay. The third story houses smaller window openings with glass block infill. At the third story of the east end bay, a large rectangular opening indicates the former location of an enclosed connector that linked the building to the Ogden Avenue viaduct. The east elevation of Section A is two bays long and is fenestrated similarly to Section B, with arched window openings that have been infilled with brick.

The angled west elevation of Section A, not immediately adjacent to the Ogden Avenue viaduct, is the best preserved elevation. The southernmost window bays house factory sash windows on the lower floors and infilled openings at the third story. A single entrance is located at the south end of the elevation. In the northern bays, the original multi-paned wood windows are extant within the original arched openings on all floors.

Section C (1911)

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Section C forms the largest portion of the east side of the building. Designed by the same architect and built only months after Section A, Section C features fenestration patterns and exterior detailing consistent with Sections A and B. The east elevation, facing Hickory Avenue, features common brick walls regularly fenestrated with pairs of segmental-arched window openings on the third story and smaller arched openings on the second story. All of the second-story window openings were infilled with brick in the early 1930s when the Ogden Avenue viaduct feeder ramp was constructed. The nine-over-nine double hung windows on the third story are, with few exceptions, intact, although some are obscured by corrugated metal panels. The first story holds primarily loading entrances, which are intact, as well as several pairs of six-over-six double hung windows near the center of the elevation. The west elevation is similarly fenestrated, but the original windows are extant in the original openings behind corrugated metal panels. The south elevation, facing Bliss Street, is unornamented common brick and minimally fenestrated with six small segmental-arched window openings on the second story and six larger segmental-arched openings on the third story. The original windows are intact within the openings, although some have been covered with metal panels. At the west end of the elevation is a projecting entrance, topped by a substantial concrete lintel with pressed geometric detailing. The original wood door is extant within the original opening, topped with a six-light transom.

Section D (1926-1927)

Section D, a six-story masonry industrial building with exposed concrete structural members and brick spandrel panels framing large multi-light steel sash windows, dominates the Peck & Hills site and the surrounding area. The long west elevation extends nearly 260 feet along North Branch Street and the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Pacific rail line. The west elevation is fifteen bays long. Four bays from the south end, this elevation angles east. In the second and fourteenth bays on this elevation, the concrete piers project to form decorative piers, and smaller projecting piers form three smaller window openings within the bay. Geometric detailing is cast into the concrete between the first and second story windows. The third and thirteenth bays house smaller factory sash windows separated by flat panels of brick. In the remaining bays, the steel sash windows extend uninterrupted from pier to pier. An original entrance with a pair of wood and glass doors is located three bays from the north end. The entrance surround is simple, with a large unornamented concrete lintel and simple brick detailing above.

The north elevation of Section D is eight bays wide and very similar to the west elevation, with large rectangular steel sash windows framed by exposed concrete structural members and brick spandrels. The first story of the north elevation houses a loading entrance. The first and second stories at the east end of the north elevation extend to connect Section D with Section C. A metal fire escape is situated at the east end of the north elevation.

Because the building narrows as it extends south, the south elevation is only one bay wide and

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houses steel sash windows on the upper floors and an original entrance with double doors at the first story.

The east elevation, fronting onto the rail spur, is fenestrated with two window openings per bay, separated by masonry piers. The steel sash windows on this elevation are mostly covered with metal panels.

Although several window openings have been infilled with brick, the vast majority of the steel sash windows are extant on all elevations.

Interior

Typical of early twentieth century industrial buildings, the interior of the Peck & Hills Furniture Company Warehouse is open and utilitarian with exposed structure and few partitions save for elevator and stair enclosures and masonry fire walls.

In Section B (the earliest of the structures and the only one not made of concrete) the slender square wood posts, wood beams and joists are all exposed, with wood flooring and exposed masonry walls.

Section A, which was built in 1911 but partially reconstructed in the 1930s, features polygonal columns with flared polygonal capitals supporting wide, shallow beams, concrete floors, and exposed masonry exterior walls.

Section C, also completed in 1911, utilized a structural system developed by engineers Condron & Sinks. Reinforcement was concentrated at right angles between the enlarged “mushroom” columns, making a shallow grid that broke up the continuous flat slab. This system was designed to save space and add height to the floors, giving more storage volume. As with most early examples of concrete construction, the structural system was completely concealed from the exterior by non-load-bearing masonry exterior walls.

Section D is a typical and well-preserved example of flat slab concrete construction that became most popular in the 1920s, with mushroom columns supporting a flat floor slab and concrete structure exposed at the exterior walls, with brick spandrels filling the spaces between large expanses of windows. The building features enclosed stairs with simple pipe railings, large freight elevators, fire walls, and enclosures separated with large metal fire doors.

Integrity

The Peck & Hills Furniture Company Warehouse retains good interior and exterior integrity, with

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no major non-historic additions. The most significant change to the exterior of the building—the partial demolition of Section A and the infilling of window openings on the east elevations of Sections A, B, and C—occurred during the period of significance and are reminders of the Ogden Avenue viaduct, which was itself an important part of the history of Goose Island. The number of infilled window openings accounts for approximately 17% of the total openings in the building, and the vast majority of the infilled openings are small half-windows.

The interior and exterior of the building retain sufficient integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association to convey its significance as the primary warehouse and distribution center for the Peck & Hills Furniture Company.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Commerce

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Period of Significance

1905-1942

Significant Dates

1905, 1911, 1927 (dates of construction)

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

William Earnest Walker

N. Max Dunning

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Peck & Hills Furniture Company Warehouse is locally significant under National Register Criterion A as the primary distribution and warehouse facility for the Peck & Hills Furniture Company. The company was founded in 1896 in Chicago by Charles G. Peck and Jay C. Hills as a small wholesaler of furniture, but quickly grew to be the largest distributor in the United States by 1929. The Peck & Hills Furniture Company maintained 25 branches across the country and supplied furniture, floor coverings, and draperies for residences, schools, hospitals, offices, and hotels.

Furniture wholesalers like Peck & Hills served as the critical link between the manufacturer and the retailer for one of the city's largest industries. Only the largest furniture manufacturers could afford to handle their own distribution and merchandising; the vast majority of furniture producers relied on wholesalers to serve this function. On the retail side, wholesalers streamlined the buying process by serving as a single point of sale for a wide variety of manufacturers' products. From its founding the company maintained a sales office and display rooms in Chicago's Furniture Row, a concentrated district of furniture dealers, wholesale houses, and showrooms on Michigan Avenue and Wabash Avenue south of the Loop. However, it was the Peck & Hills warehouses and shipping facilities on Goose Island, established in 1901 and significantly expanded through the 1920s, which were central to the firm's success in servicing a nationwide distribution network. The company's growth and success in the first half of the twentieth century exemplifies both Chicago's development in this period as a rail hub and its dominance in wholesaling, especially in the distribution and marketing of furniture.

The Peck & Hills Furniture Company Warehouse is also significant as a well-preserved example of an industrial building in the former manufacturing and warehouse district on Goose Island. During its heyday in the early twentieth century, Goose Island was a concentrated pocket of industrial development on the north side of Chicago that included tanneries, packing plants, coal yards, grain elevators, and various manufacturing concerns. Today, the Peck & Hills Company Warehouse is one of only a handful of structures that reflects that period of the island's history.

The period of significance for the Peck & Hills Furniture Company Warehouse is 1905-1942, reflecting the years that Peck & Hills occupied the building.

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Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Wholesale Furniture Industry in Chicago

Like most cities, Chicago has long been a center not just for manufacturing, but also for the exchange and distribution of goods. As Mark R. Wilson writes in the *Encyclopedia of Chicago*: “Some of the most important actors in this urban economy have been wholesalers—that is, merchants who specialize in connecting the producers of commodities with the retailers who sell them to final users.”¹

Chicago’s central location and its network of railroads made the city a logical choice for the wholesale trade. By the turn of the century, Chicago had emerged as the most important railroad center in the country with tracks radiating in more directions than any other city. Initially, the system of railroads that connected the city to the wheat fields of northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin, in addition to the Midwest cities of Detroit, Cleveland, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Kansas City, Omaha, and St. Paul, had served to make Chicago the central point of the grain, livestock, and meat packing industries. Early wholesalers such as Marshall Field and mail-order retailers such as Montgomery Ward recognized that the system of rail lines bringing grain and livestock into Chicago for processing could also be used as a distribution system that delivered finished goods cheaply and efficiently to those same far-flung farming communities.

The same advantages that made Chicago a major wholesale and merchandising center also made the city a major manufacturing center, with record volumes of goods produced by the turn of the century ranging from candy to farm implements. As early as the mid-nineteenth century, Chicago had emerged as a leader in furniture production. Extensive railroad connections provided access to lumber and retailers, and the city’s German and Scandinavian immigrants provided a ready pool of skilled labor. The early Chicago furniture industry consisted primarily of small craft shops (many of which were owned and operated by first-generation immigrants) producing a wide range of products. These manufacturers were located along the North and South branches of the Chicago River close to their labor force, the lumber yards, and the meatpacking industries that supplied the furniture industry with hair, leather and glue for its finished products.²

The depression of the 1890s destroyed many of these smaller immigrant-led furniture producers, and increased the size and influence of the mid-sized and large manufacturers that survived. In

¹ Mark R. Wilson, “Wholesaling,” *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, accessed March 6, 2014, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1354.html>.

² Sharon S. Darling, *Chicago Furniture: Art, Craft & Industry, 1833-1983* (New York: Chicago Historical Society in association with W.W. Norton, 1984).

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1900, Chicago's 100 furniture plants averaged 70 workers per firm. By 1910, over 200 furniture manufacturers in Chicago employed over 10,000 workers. By 1920, the city housed 350 furniture factories that employed over 15,000 workers and produced over \$70,000,000 in furnished goods that were distributed all over the country. Chicago manufactured one-fifth of the United States' furniture and the city ranked second only to New York in value of furniture produced.³

As furniture production in Chicago increased, so did the number of wholesale buyers who specialized in furniture distribution and merchandising. Furniture wholesalers served as the critical link between manufacturer and consumer for one of the city's largest industries. As historian Robert Lewis points out in *Chicago Made: Factory Networks in the Industrial Metropolis*, only the largest furniture manufacturers could afford to handle their own distribution and merchandising. "Larger firms kept their own showrooms, usually adjoining the factory, while those within non-central factories sometimes, if they were large enough and thus could obtain some economies of scale, rented a showroom in the city center. But most were unable to do this; they needed an intermediary."⁴

Wholesale furniture jobbers not only supplied large stocks of furniture to retailers across the country, they also worked to establish new markets for furniture manufacturers. On the production side, wholesalers relieved manufacturers of the costs associated with marketing, selling, and distributing their goods directly, allowing factories to be dedicated solely to production. On the retail side, wholesalers streamlined the buying process by serving as a single point of sale for a wide variety of manufacturers' products. By buying in large quantities, wholesalers were able to offer products at factory costs.⁵

Because furniture wholesalers assumed the costs of marketing the furniture to retailers, most wholesale operations maintained offices and display space in a central location in close proximity to others in the trade. By 1910 in Chicago, a district of large exhibition halls had grown up along Indiana and Wabash Avenues south of Roosevelt Road, including the Manufacturer's Exhibition Building at 1319 South Wabash, the Furniture Manufacturing Building at 1304-1324 South Indiana Avenue, the Furniture Exposition Building at 1406-1412 South Indiana, the Central Market Furniture Building at 1414 South Wabash Avenue, and the Manufacturers' Furniture Exchange at 1353-1355 South Wabash. This concentration of exhibition halls served as the first central furniture mart in the city, providing "manufacturers with a centralized site where they could

³ Marshall Field & Company, *Chicago: The Great Central Market* (Chicago: Marshall Field & company, 1921). Sharon S. Darling, *Chicago Furniture: Art, Craft & Industry, 1833-1983* (New York: Chicago Historical Society in association with W.W. Norton, 1984).

⁴ Robert D. Lewis, *Chicago Made: Factory Networks in the Industrial Metropolis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 231.

⁵ "Stating the Case of the Furniture Jobber," *Good Furniture & Decoration* 19 (July-Dec. 1922): 23.

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show off their range of styles and bypass the dispersed geography of factories.”⁶ This increasing trend toward consolidation of exhibition space led in 1924 to the construction of the massive 16-story American Furniture Mart on the Near North Side, which covered an entire city block, housed 34 acres of rentable space and could handle more than 350 carloads of furniture in a week. Like the smaller exhibition halls that it supplanted, the Furniture Mart was open only to wholesale buyers, preserving the method of distribution that required that goods flow from manufacturer to wholesaler to retailer.⁷

Although these exhibition spaces served as the public face of the furniture wholesaler, successful wholesale operations depended not on elaborate showrooms or impressive offices, but on large, efficient and strategically located warehouse and distribution facilities. Wholesalers had to maintain sufficient space to store large stocks of goods and be able to distribute those goods quickly to respond to retailer demand. Large wholesale operations depended on the ability to buy goods in huge quantities from manufacturers, which they assembled “at a logical distributing point, usually in slack seasons, to be passed on to the retailer in the busy season.”⁸ A large modern warehouse with good access to rail lines was the critical component for any furniture wholesaler in the early twentieth century.

By 1926, Chicago was home to 255 furniture wholesalers with sales totaling more than \$58 million. The largest of these early-twentieth century furniture wholesalers was the Peck & Hills Furniture Company, which was founded in Chicago in 1896 and had grown by 1929 into the largest wholesale distributor of furniture in the United States.⁹

The Peck & Hills Furniture Company

Peck & Hills Furniture Company was founded in 1896 in Chicago by Jay Curdy Hills (1872-1949) and Charles G. Peck (1861-1914). Hills was born in 1872 in Michigan and served as the guiding force of the company from its inception until the early 1930s. Well-respected in the industry, Hills’ leadership was instrumental in the expansion of the company from a small commission house into a large nation-wide wholesale furniture company with dozens of branch offices and distribution facilities across the county.

When Peck & Hills first opened in Chicago, the company leased space in the South Loop in an

⁶ Lewis, 231.

⁷ Ibid.

Marshall Field & Company, *Chicago: The Great Central Market* (Chicago: Marshall Field & Company, 1921).

⁸ “Stating the Case of the Furniture Jobber,” *Good Furniture & Decoration* 19 (July-Dec. 1922).

⁹ Robert D. Lewis, *Chicago Made: Factory Networks in the Industrial Metropolis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 224.

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existing loft building at 266 South Wabash. In April 1901, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported that the company had purchased from the Linderman Box and Veneer Company a one-story warehouse building at the southwest corner of Hickory Avenue and Bliss Street on Goose Island, directly adjacent to the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad. The building, constructed in 1879, allowed Peck & Hills to establish a presence in Goose Island's burgeoning industrial district, and the proximity to rail service proved ideal for distribution of the company's products.

The next year, Jay C. Hills, Walter J. Hills, and A.B. McCall listed Peck & Hills Furniture Company as incorporators with \$50,000 in capital. Charles G. Peck withdrew from the business, and soon after moved to Wisconsin to take up farming. He died in Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin in a tragic farming accident in 1914.¹⁰ Between 1902 and 1904, Jay C. Hills aggressively pursued new markets for the company's furniture lines. In 1904, Hills and McCall established connections in Cuba and Mexico that helped to differentiate the company from its competitors. Both men learned to speak Spanish in order to effectively communicate with their buyers, and the experience sparked a lifelong love of travel in Hills.¹¹ During this period the company also began publishing its own catalogue, which would become a key element of its advertising in the 1910s and 1920s. The October 25, 1904 issue of the *Furniture Journal* reported that the new catalogue numbered nearly six hundred pages, "showing selections from more than one hundred of the popular lines of the country."¹²

By 1905, the company had moved its office and showroom to the third floor of the Manufacturers' Exhibition Building at 1319 South Wabash as work began on a new three-story warehouse to replace the building they had purchased in 1901. Architect Henry Wittekind designed the simple timber frame building with masonry walls.

Between 1905 and 1910, Peck & Hills continued to expand their wholesale operations. In 1906, the company moved its offices and showroom space again to the newly completed Manufacturers' Furniture Exchange at 1351-1353 South Wabash. Jay Hills was listed as the Secretary of the Exchange and Peck & Hills occupied three floors of the new building.¹³ However, the company's new warehouse on Goose Island made a bigger impression with those in the furniture industry. In 1907, the *Michigan Artisan* reported:

President J.C. Hills of the Peck & Hills Furniture Company states that the volume of business being done by his company this year is exceptionally large. A visit to the big warehouse of this company, located at Hickory and Bliss streets, makes such a

¹⁰ *Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 14, 1902.

Furniture Manufacturer 9 (Jan. 1914)

¹¹ *Furniture Manufacturers and Artisans* 11 (1914): 245.

¹² *Furniture Journal* (Oct. 25, 1904): 53.

¹³ Illinois Office of Secretary of State, *Certified List of Domestic and Foreign Corporations filed with the Recorder* (Danville, Illinois: Illinois Printing Company, 1913).

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marked impression on the visitor that one cannot fail to appreciate the statement made by Mr. Hill. About a year and a half ago the Peck & Hills Furniture Company began the erection of their warehouse buildings and today they have a building 400 x80 and an addition 200x50. The company has a work force of 100 employed there.¹⁴

With the increased capacity at their Chicago distribution facility, Peck & Hills expanded its operations to the west coast. A 1909 *Chicago Daily Tribune* advertisement showed that the company had established offices in Los Angeles and Oakland, California, serving as factory agents and distributors for a line of over 100 furniture manufacturers.

By 1910, the Peck & Hills Furniture Company found it necessary to expand its warehouse and distribution facilities in Chicago yet again. This time the company hired well-known industrial architect William Ernest Walker and engineers Condron and Sinks, who specialized in industrial concrete construction, to design and build two large modern additions to its existing timber frame building. The two structures, both completed in 1911, extended the existing timber frame building north along Hickory Avenue to Bliss Street and south to the rail line. Although Walker designed the exteriors of the additions to blend seamlessly with the older building through the use of relatively small window openings and masonry facades, the structure of the additions was completely new. The additions utilized an innovative type of concrete floor construction developed by Sinks in 1907 known as "intersecting slab," which combined elements of flat-slab construction with a system of shallow reinforced girders. The Peck & Hills warehouse was featured in numerous concrete trade publications as an exemplary example of this new construction method.¹⁵

In the 1910s, the Peck & Hills Furniture Company continued to increase its presence on the west coast, establishing a distribution warehouse in Emeryville, California in 1913. However, the company's Goose Island warehouse still served as its primary distribution point. A 1915 catalogue issued by the company was titled "Peck & Hills Dependable Furnishing: Shipped Promptly from Chicago." By 1916, the company was advertising in such national publications as the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Good Housekeeping*, and had established additional branch houses in New York, Denver, and San Francisco. The advertisement boasted a million-dollar stock of furnishings, floor coverings, and draperies sold by P&H dealers.¹⁶ During the 1910s, the company also introduced a new system of marketing that allowed consumers with cards of introduction from Peck & Hill dealers to buy directly from the company's five large wholesale houses in Chicago, New York, Denver, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. This system was inaugurated specifically to address the problem of competition from retail mail order houses that sold directly to consumers. The process

¹⁴ *Michigan Artisan* (Nov. 25, 1906): 38.

¹⁵ *Factory and Warehouses of Concrete* (1911): 211-213.
Universal Portland Cement Co., monthly bulletin no. 84, May 1911.
Cement World 4 (Feb. 15, 1911).

¹⁶ *Saturday Evening Post*, November 18, 1916.

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also protected the local retailer by ensuring that he still received his commission for the sale while allowing the customer to choose from the widest selection of products offered by Peck & Hills.¹⁷

In 1920, the *Grand Rapids Furniture Record* reported that the previous fiscal year had seen Peck & Hills's shipments increase by 73% over the previous year. In 1921, the company's annual sales topped \$9 million. In response to the increased traffic at its Goose Island warehouse and the increase in manufacturing partners, the company took over all eight floors of the Manufacturers' Furniture Exchange at 1351-1353 South Wabash. The Peck & Hill lines included wood, rattan and upholstered furniture of all kinds, oriental and domestic rugs, carpets, sweepers, vacuum cleaners, and phonographs, all of which were stored and shipped from the Goose Island warehouse.¹⁸

During the 1920s, the company continued to expand its wholesale operations, adding branch houses in Boston, Philadelphia, Houston, Dallas, Portland, and Seattle, and adding a new warehouse and distribution facility in Oakland to serve its burgeoning Pacific coast market. Advertisement for the company now included the tag line "Peck & Hills: Coast to Coast."¹⁹ A 1923 advertisement in the *Grand Rapids Furniture Record* succinctly summarized the company's appeal to furniture buyers:

Mixed and Pool Cars—one account, one shipment, your bill dated when car leaves Chicago. No cartage—no assembling charge and practically no advance freight on merchandise ordered through us, or going on cars we load. Prices are right—terms are reasonable—guarantees that are dependable—and national advertising.²⁰

It was during this period of rapid expansion in the 1920s that the company added its final piece to the warehouse and distribution house on Goose Island. In 1926, Peck & Hills commissioned architect Nelson Max Dunning (1874-1946) to design a six-story modern warehouse facility that would nearly triple the size of the company's facility. Dunning was a conscious choice for Peck & Hills; he was well-known in the furniture industry as one of the designers of the American Furniture Mart. While working on the Peck & Hills warehouse, Dunning was also completing plans for the 1925-26 addition to the Furniture Mart. His commercial and factory buildings of the 1910s and 1920s, including the American Book Company Building (1912), were considered to be his strongest work.²¹

¹⁷ "Using Displays in Big Cities to Speed up Small Dealers," *Printer's Ink* (Sept. 7, 1916).

¹⁸ *The Grand Rapids Furniture Record* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grand Rapids Furniture Record Co., September 1920 and June 1921), 118.

¹⁹ Various advertisements for Peck & Hill.

²⁰ *The Grand Rapids Furniture Record* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grand Rapids Furniture Record Co., 1923).

²¹ Chicago Landmarks Report on the American Book Company Building.

Henry F. Withey and Elsie Rathburn Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (deceased)* (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, 1970), 184.

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Dunning's design for the Peck & Hills warehouse reflected the advances in industrial construction that had occurred since the company's last warehouse expansion in 1910. The new building, which was completed in 1927, was flat-slab concrete construction. In contrast to Walker's concrete additions, the exterior of the new building clearly reflected its construction with exposed concrete framing members. Brick spandrel panels supported large expanses of multi-light steel sash windows, designed to allow for maximum light and ventilation. The building followed the irregular shape of the lot, narrowing as it progressed south between the rail lines and resembling the prow of a ship when viewed from its narrow south façade. At the time of its completion, the new building was the most prominent industrial structure standing on Goose Island.

The year after the new warehouse was completed, the Peck & Hills Furniture Company reached total shipments of over \$16 million. The company purchased the Birmingham Furniture and Manufacturing Company, extending its reach into the South. As the *Omaha World Herald* reported on September 10, 1928, "The concern now has a chain of houses in ten of the largest cities of country, one in Cuba, and one in Mexico. It is understood that the acquisition of additional distributing houses will be continued until the goal of [true] national distribution is reached."²² In 1929, the *Stone and Webster Journal* reported that Peck & Hills was the largest distributor of furniture in the United States, with 25 branch houses and headquarters in Chicago."²³

The Great Depression halted the seemingly relentless expansion of the Peck & Hills Furniture Company. Like many furniture concerns, Peck & Hills struggled to stay in business during the 1930s. In 1931, the company announced that it would open its doors to retail customers for the first time. Initially, Peck & Hills claimed that the decision was simply an extension of the company's mission of "placing good furniture in the homes of the nation" and stressed that the policy was only being implemented on the west coast. However, by 1932 when the company closed its Philadelphia branch house and opened a retail annex in its Boston branch The *Boston Herald* reported bluntly: "Although the retail policy will be permanent, the immediate object is to reduce the company's heavy wholesale stock. The 21 branches of the company throughout the country are now on a retail basis."²⁴

1932 also saw the resignation of the Jay C. Hills as president of the company. On June 29, 1934, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* announced that J. M. Palmer, former vice president of the company in Chicago, had purchased the "equipment, name, and goodwill of the old company and have formed a new company under the old name." Peck & Hills thus continued to operate in Chicago much as it had before through the early 1940s, leasing office and showroom space at 14th and Wabash and maintaining its warehouse and distribution facilities on Goose Island.²⁵ In December 1942,

²² *Omaha World Herald*, September 10, 1928.

²³ *Stone and Webster Journal* (1929).

²⁴ "Peck & Hills Furniture Co. Will Open Retail Annex to Its Boston Branch," *Boston Herald*, March 27, 1932.

²⁵ "Group Headed by Palmer Buys Peck and Hills," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 29, 1934, 19.

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Chicago retailer Wieboldt Stores, Inc. purchased the Peck & Hills warehouses for \$300,000, indicating the final blow to Peck & Hills' once substantial wholesale operation in Chicago.²⁶ The company continued to operate primarily on the west coast into the 1950s, but it never again rose to the prominence it had seen in the 1910s and 1920s.

The Goose Island Industrial District

The 160-acre island known as "Goose Island" was created in the 1850s, when William Ogden spearheaded an effort to improve the navigability of the Chicago River's north branch. A canal (known as the North Branch Canal) was dug from Chicago Avenue to North Avenue through low-lying clay pits to circumvent the bend in the river and create more waterway frontage. In its first decades of existence, the island was home to a small group of primarily Irish immigrant families who built cottages and lived a semi-rural life that was still in close proximity to the industrial plants along the river providing them with work.²⁷

By the late 1800s, Goose Island was connected to the city's network of rail lines, and industrial development on the island began in earnest. Fire insurance maps in 1886 show that the island was home to thirteen lumber yards, eleven coal yards, three stone yards, two slab yards and two sand yards, two grain elevators, several tanneries, a varnish company, a mattress factory, a shipyard, a roofing manufacturer, a paint works, a malt house, and a box factory (the Lindeman Box and Veneer Company's factory, which Peck & Hills purchased in 1901). The river banks adjacent to Goose Island were also lined with industrial development, including the Illinois Steel Company, located just north of the Island.²⁸

What Goose Island was best known for in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was its grain elevators. The first grain elevators were constructed on Goose Island in 1887, when packinghouse magnate Philip D. Armour commissioned the construction of three giant grain elevators (built by the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad, of which Armour was a major investor) to store grain that he had purchased to corner the grain market and control the cost of feed for his packing houses. In 1893, he commissioned additional mammoth grain elevators to be built on the island--supposedly the largest grain elevators in the world—to accommodate three million bushels of wheat that he had purchased and shipped to Chicago. The elevators were completed in 30 days, with three shifts of laborers working around the clock. These warehouses would preserve Armour's control of the grain trade that year and again in 1898, when Joseph Leiter

²⁶ "Wieboldt Buys Two Warehouses for \$300,000," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 25, 1942, 27.

²⁷ Irving Cutler, *Chicago: Metropolis of the Mid-Continent* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006), 81.

²⁸ Ann Durkin Keating, "Goose Island," *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, accessed March 6, 2014, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/300015.html>.

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attempted to corner the market. The profits—and losses—from this “wheat war” were tremendous. Leiter, son of successful Chicago merchant Levi Z Leiter, lost between \$5 and \$10 million from his failed wheat corner in 1898. ²⁹The grain elevators loomed over Goose Island until the 1930s, when the last of the grain elevators that Armour had built burned in a spectacular fire that attracted an estimated 20,000 spectators.³⁰

Sanborn maps from 1906 show the growth of the area as an industrial center. In addition to huge rail yards and grain elevators (Armour owned five along the north branch canal according to the 1906 maps), there were a wide variety of manufacturing and industrial concerns, including lumber companies (Theodore Fathauer Lumber Company, Genio Wallace. A. R. Vinnedge Lumber, and F. D. Smith Hardwood Lumber), fuel companies (Keystone Oil, City Fuel Company, Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Coal Co.), tanneries and leather companies (A.H. Ross & Sons, I. Horween & Co., The Griess Pflieger Tanning Co., Michael Kirchnoff & Sons, Illinois Leather Company, Monarch Leather Co. Tannery) box factories (Jones, Coates, & Bailey, The Kurtz Downey Company) and various other industrial and manufacturing plants, including a mattress factory, a varnish company, two “wool pulling” concerns, a tar paper company, a hay and feed company, and several gravel and stone yards. Peck & Hills was the only furniture wholesaler located on Goose Island. Small pockets of houses remained in 1906; by 1935 there were only eleven residential structures left on the island.³¹

Goose Island continued to be an important industrial center on Chicago’s north side through the 1970s. In the early 1930s, the city began construction of a viaduct that would extend Ogden Avenue across Goose Island. The viaduct was part of a larger effort to improve the citywide highways, which had emerged as part of the recommendations of the 1909 Burnham Plan. Planners speculated that connecting Goose Island to the city’s limited access highway system would help stimulate industrial development, as trucking was becoming an increasingly important method of transporting goods. Construction began on the viaduct in 1931 and was completed in 1934.³² The path of the viaduct cut directly across the southern end of the Peck & Hills Furniture Company warehouse complex and a new feeder ramp (the only connection between the viaduct and the island) was constructed along Hickory Avenue. The older sections of the building were most affected; Section A (1911) was truncated and the south façade completely rebuilt. The Hickory Avenue ramp was constructed directly up against the east side of the building. Consequently, many of the window openings on that side of the building were infilled with brick, although several of the loading entrances could still be accessed underneath the ramp. Although the viaduct and feeder ramp were demolished in 1993, the Peck & Hills Furniture Company

²⁹ Ibid, accessed November 13, 2014.

³⁰ “Fight to Save Big Oil Tanks from Flames,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 15 May 1930, 1.

³¹ Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Maps, 1906 vol. 2, pp125-136.

³² Ibid.

Serhii Chucky, “The Extension and Removal of Ogden Avenue,” *Forgotten Chicago*, accessed March 6, 2014, <http://forgottenchicago.com/features/the-extension-and-removal-of-ogden-avenue/>.

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Warehouse still bears the scars from this important public works project.

Much of the historic industrial built environment on Goose Island has, like the viaduct, been demolished over the past 30 years. In the 1980s, when most of the island's industrial concerns left, the city debated whether to allow the area to be re-zoned for residential development, but the decision was ultimately made to preserve the island's industrial character. Today, only a handful of structures remain from what was an important industrial district on the city's north side. The Peck & Hills Furniture Company Warehouse is a rare survivor, and one of the most visually prominent early twentieth century industrial buildings remaining on the island.

Conclusion

The impressive Peck & Hills Furniture Company Warehouse is significant as the primary and central warehouse and distribution facility for the Chicago-based furniture wholesaler which, by 1929, was the largest distributor of furniture in the United States, maintaining 25 branches across the country and supplying furniture, floor coverings, and draperies for residences, schools, hospitals, offices, and hotels. The building is also significant as a well-preserved example of early twentieth-century warehouse engineering and construction and as a rare survivor in Chicago's Goose Island industrial district.

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<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1354.html>.

Withey, Henry F. and Elsie Rathburn Withey. *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (deceased)*. Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, 1970.

“Wieboldt Buys Two Warehouses for \$300,000.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*. December 25, 1942.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☒ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):

10. Geographical Data

Acres of Property Less than one acre

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 41.901438 | Longitude: -87.651570 |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

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Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The site is bounded on the north by West Bliss Street, on the east by North Hickory Avenue, on the south by West Haines Street, and on the west by North North Branch Street.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The site boundary consists of the property historically associated with the Peck and Hills Furniture Company Warehouse at 909 West Bliss Street in Chicago, Illinois.

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Emily Ramsey
organization: MacRostie Historic Advisors LLC
street & number: 53 West Jackson Blvd, Suite 1323
city or town: Chicago state: IL zip code: 60604
e-mail: eramsey@mac-ha.com
telephone: 312-786-1700
date: November 14, 2014

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

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Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Peck and Hills Furniture Company Warehouse

City or Vicinity: Chicago

County: Cook

State: IL

Photographer: Emily Ramsey

Date Photographed: February 2014

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1. North and west elevation, looking south
2. North elevation, looking southwest
3. North and east elevations, looking southwest
4. South and east elevations, looking north
5. South elevation, looking north
6. Central courtyard, looking north
7. Detail of west elevation, looking east
8. Door detail on west elevation, looking east
9. Typical interior, Section B
10. Typical interior, Section A
11. Typical interior, Section D
12. Detail, interior fire door

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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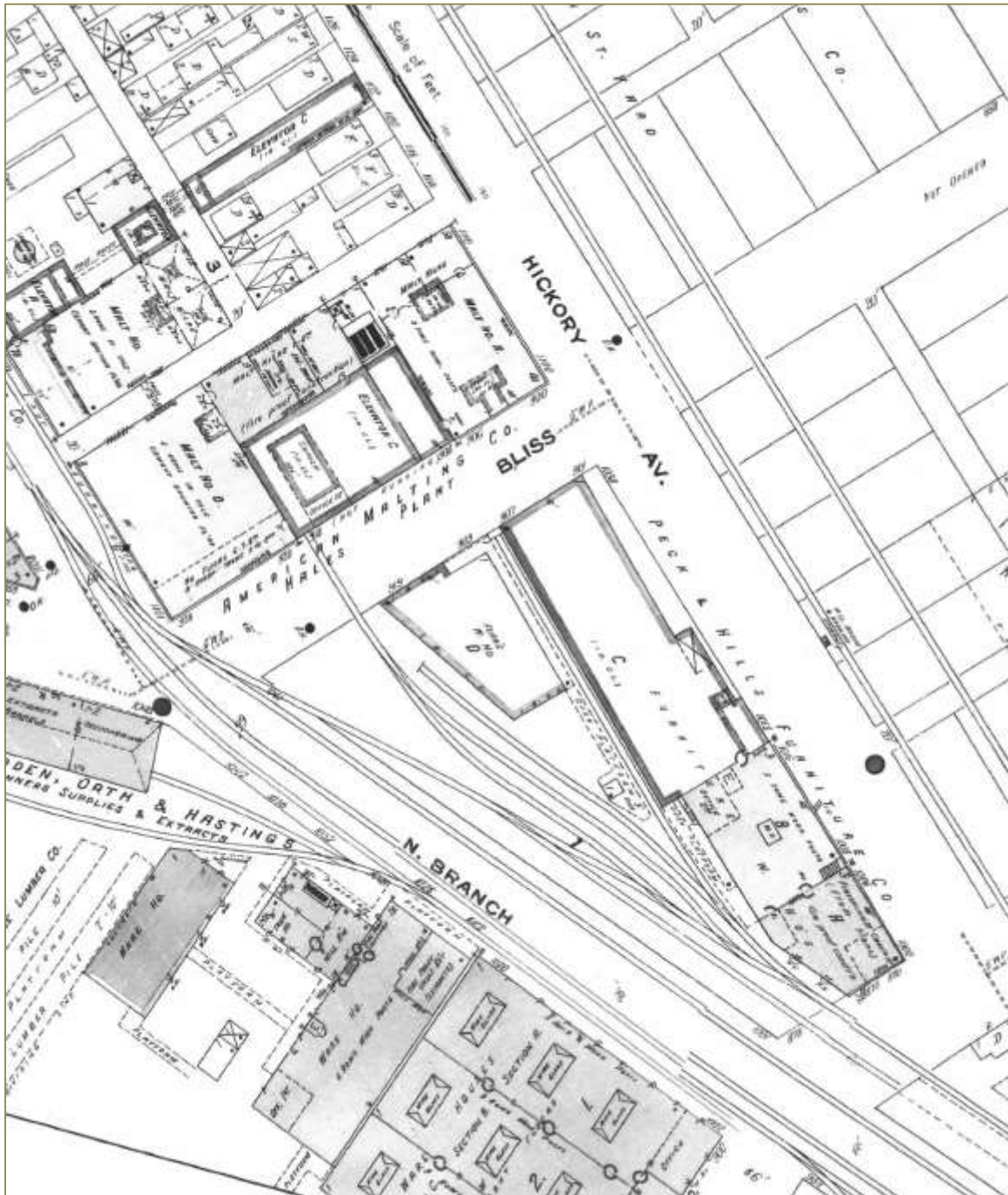


Figure 01. Chicago, Illinois Sanborn Map, 1910

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Figure 02. Chicago, Illinois Sanborn Map, 1935

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Figure 03. Peck and Hills Warehouse circa 1911 (Sections A, B, and C)

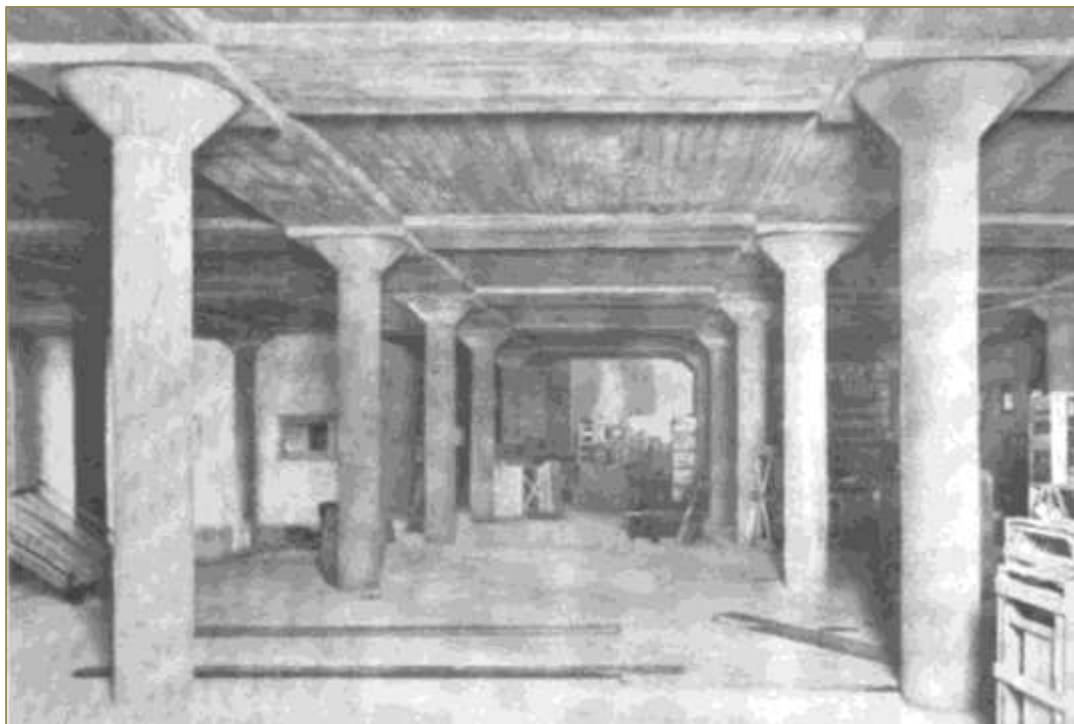


Figure 04. Peck and Hills Warehouse, Section C interior, 1911

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Figure 05. Peck and Hills Warehouse, Section B interior, 1911

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Figure 06. Construction of Ogden Viaduct circa 1932, showing Peck and Hills Warehouse at upper right

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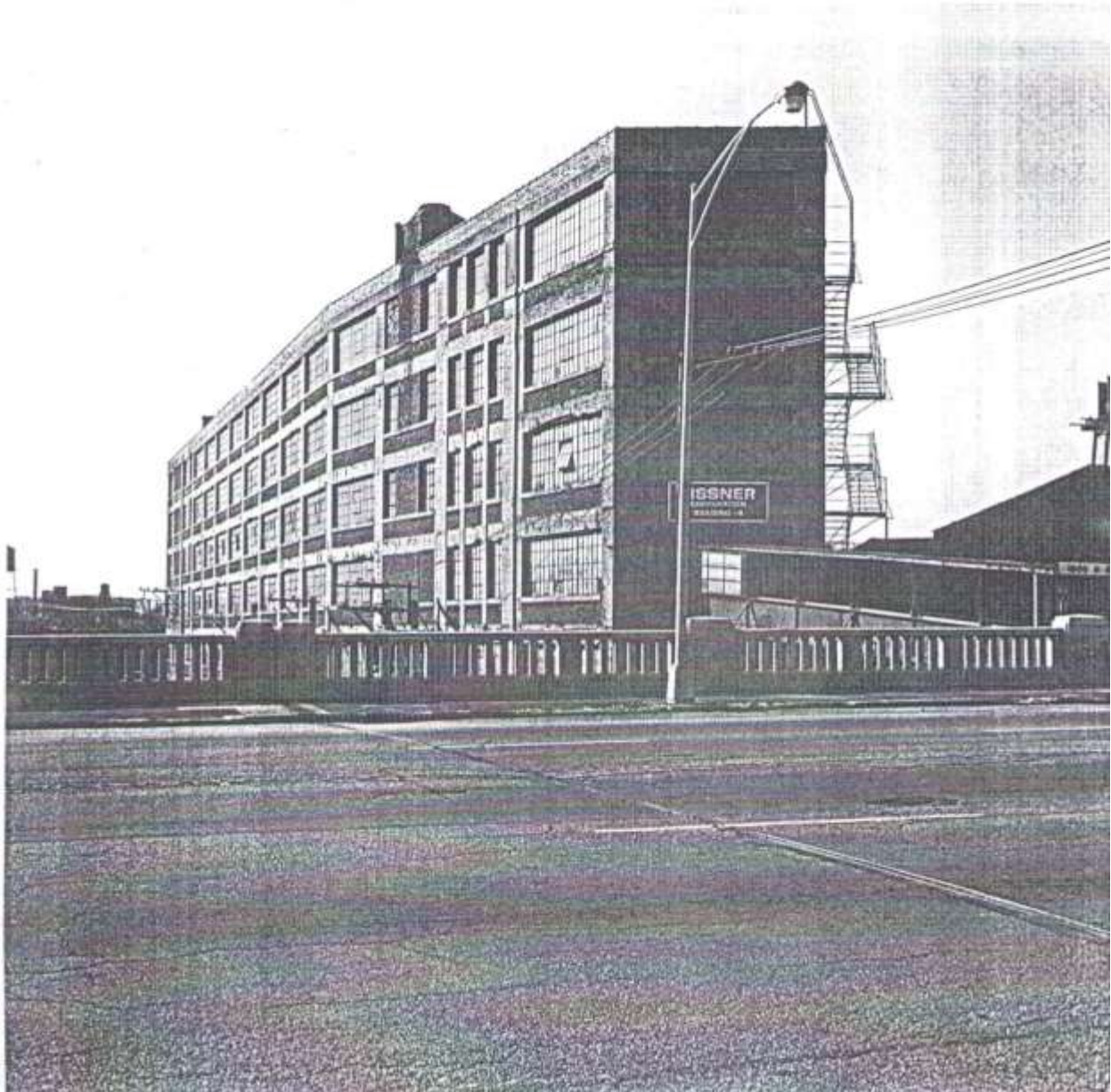


Figure 07. View of Section D looking north from Ogden Avenue viaduct, 1989

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Ask Your Furniture Dealer for "P & H" Dependable Home Furnishings.

When you come to buy furniture or home furnishings it is advisable to make all your purchases from a furniture dealer who handles Peck & Hills Furniture. By doing so you will get guaranteed high quality, latest style, extremely low prices and harmonious interiors.

Peck & Hills Furniture

If your local "P. & H." dealer hasn't everything you want on his sales floor, ask him to show you our big 900-page catalogue which illustrates, often in color, everything for furnishing the home. You can make your selection from this book and your dealer can then easily and quickly get it for you, telling you the exact price in advance.

By getting a card from this same dealer you can visit our nearest showroom in any of the cities mentioned below, see everything you saw in our catalogue, make your selections without extra cost, give us the order and it will be delivered through your local dealer, and you pay him.

Satisfaction guaranteed or money back

We have led the furniture field for 20 years and thousands of people are proud to say that their homes are furnished with stylish, dependable Peck & Hills Furniture.

Ask Your Dealer About P. & H. Furniture

today—or get his introduction card and call at our nearest showroom. We sell through dealers only.

Wabash Ave. and 14th St., Chicago
141 Madison Ave., New York City
1748 Lawrence Street, Denver
800 San Fernando Street, Los Angeles
2nd & Brannan Sts., San Francisco
Headquarters for Hotel, Office, Library, School and Assembly Furnishings.

SEWING TABLE X-105
ROCKER OR CHAIR X-103
TEA WAGON X-104
MUSIC CABINET X-100
LADIES DESK X-101
SUITABLE HOLIDAY SUGGESTIONS

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Figure 08. Peck and Hills advertisement in *Good Housekeeping* magazine, December 1914

The Rugged Honesty
of Lincoln

One of the qualities we most admire about Lincoln was his rugged honesty. We earnestly strive to incorporate this same quality in all the dealings of this store. We understate, rather than exaggerate, in our advertising, lest error of mis-representation creep in. The claims of our salesmen for our goods are moderate. All this, rigidly followed, that our reputation for honesty in merchandising may never be shadowed by a single case of dissatisfaction by a customer.

Equal
Quality
and
Service
at Less
Cost.
Why?

NEW YORK - CHICAGO - DENVER
Peck & Hills
FURNITURE CO.
HONOLULU
DEPENDABLE
FURNISHINGS
LOS ANGELES - OAKLAND - SAN FRANCISCO

800
NORTH
SPRING ST
LOS
ANGELES
CAL.

Take any North Broadway Car to Alpine

Figure 09. Peck and Hills advertisement, 1917